

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood, urging the agency to provide federal aid to repair a large sinkhole on Washington Avenue in the City of Kingston, which was caused by the severe storms and flooding that occurred between April 26 and May 8. The roadway repair is eligible for federal aid as a result of a Federal Disaster Declaration recently granted after Hinchey led a bipartisan group of New York House members in calling for the designation.

"Washington Avenue is a major thoroughfare in the City of Kingston and this sinkhole is causing problems for businesses, visitors and residents," said Hinchey. " According to the city, the recent heavy rains that justified a Federal Disaster Declaration have increased the water levels that run beneath the road and loosened soil, leading to this sink hole. This situation needs to be addressed quickly before things get worse. That's why I'm urging the Department of Transportation to work with the state and the city so that emergency federal assistance can be delivered as soon as possible and relieve local taxpayers of this major financial burden."

The text of Hinchey's letter to the Secretary of Transportation LaHood follows.

June 15, 2011

Ray LaHood - Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

I am writing to call your attention to a critical situation involving a federal aid roadway located in the City of Kingston, Ulster County, New York. As you may know, Ulster County recently experienced a severe weather event and a Federal Disaster Declaration for Severe Storms, Flooding, Tornadoes, and Straight-line Winds was declared for the region covering the period of April 26 – May 8, 2011 (FEMA 1993 DR). The heavy rains and run-off that occurred during this event led to the development of a large sink hole on Washington Avenue, forcing the City to

close the roadway to all but residential traffic. Under a federal disaster declaration the Federal Highway Administration has the ability to act quickly to address these types of situations and I urge your department to work closely with the New York State Department of Transportation and the City of Kingston so that emergency federal assistance can be quickly provided to address this growing problem.

Washington Avenue is a major thoroughfare for the City of Kingston, traversing east to west and connecting the New York State Thruway with State Route 32. In addition to being a primary commercial corridor, it also provides access to the city's Uptown Historical Business District and to two of the city's densely populated residential communities. This sink hole, currently large enough to fit a car, has caused a major disruption to the normal traffic patterns in the city and poses a potential risk to the underlying infrastructure running at depths of up to 70 feet under the roadway. This infrastructure includes a main water transmission line, as well as one of the major storm water and wastewater tunnels for the city. At the present time, the City of Kingston is operating the water main at a reduced rate, fearing further roadway degradation might cause damage to the line, disrupting service to the community. Additionally, damage to the storm water and wastewater tunnel could pose a major health hazard for the city's residents. The economic disruption resulting from changes in traffic patterns, including the routes of a major statewide bus line, will continue to escalate if timely action to repair the road is not undertaken.

The recent heavy rains caused high water flows in Tannery Brook, which runs directly into the wastewater tunnel running beneath the section of collapsed roadway. The elevated water level in the brook, as well as the vertical shaft connected to the tunnel, coupled with the high groundwater levels, appear to be hydraulically driving the soil loss that has helped cause the sink hole.

This is a very important matter facing the region and I urge the Department to work closely with the state and city so that emergency federal assistance is delivered as quickly as possible. Thank you for your assistance

Best regards.

Sincerely,

Thursday, 16 June 2011 00:00

---

Maurice D. Hinchey

cc: Victor Mendez - Administrator  
Federal Highways Administration  
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Michael Davies, Acting Division Administrator  
New York Division  
Federal Highways Administration  
Leo W. O'Brien Federal Building  
Clinton Avenue and North Pearl Street - Room 719  
Albany, New York 12207

William Gorton, PE, Acting Regional Director  
NYS Department of Transportation  
Eleanor Roosevelt State Office Building  
4 Burnett Boulevard  
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603

Mayor James Sottile  
City of Kingston  
City Hall - 420 Broadway  
Kingston, NY 12401